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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA1178, NICARAGUA: OPPOSITION LEADER MONTEALEGRE

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA1178**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA1178	2008-09-18 23:27	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758464.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4041/millones-de-dolares-sin-control-y-a-disolucion>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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PP RUEHLMC
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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3168
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001178

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: OPPOSITION LEADER MONTEALEGRE
MODERATELY OPTIMISTIC

Classified By: Ambassador Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In his first meeting with Ambassador Callahan, Eduardo Montealegre, nominal leader of the Liberal opposition and candidate for Mayor of Managua under the Constitutional Liberal Party-Vamos con Eduardo (PLC-VCE) ticket, expressed optimism for his chances of election. Montealegre is framing the election as a referendum on Ortega and believes voters are unhappy with the Government's poor performance to date. Montealegre cited poll figure showing high level of intent to vote among residents and showing him with a lead of between 9 and 15 percent. Montealegre lamented continued reluctance by the private sector to support his campaign and the broader election effort. After the elections, Montealegre believes that Ortega will seek constitutional changes to perpetuate his hold on office and suggested that a long-term alliance with the PLC to unite all Liberals will be necessary to survive. END SUMMARY.

CAMPAIGN FOR MAYOR GAINING MOMENTUM

¶2. (C) Montealegre reported that the campaign for Managua was going well and that the reaction by average city residents has been surprisingly positive. Montealegre continues to go door-to-door in different neighborhoods five days a week. Usually, most mornings are devoted to meeting with associations, community groups, or coordination with other political groups. Based on his visits, Montealegre believes people are not happy with the Ortega government, high prices for gasoline and basic foodstuffs, and want better jobs, health care and schools. The prominent role of the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) - First Lady Rosario Murillo's personal project - have had an overall negative effect in voters, serving to remind them of what the FSLN did to the country in the 1980s and the failings in their current efforts to provide better and cheaper social services. The CPCs "are not helping to make people happy."

¶3. (C) According to Montealegre, internal polling conducted by a Costa Rican-based firm and other polling by the International Republican Institute point to a growing lead over FSLN candidate and former boxing champion Alexis Arguello. Current polls show between a 9 and 15 percent lead for Montealegre, with more and more independent voters breaking his way. Montealegre has yet to publicly release any of the polling, for fear of dampening the sense of urgency among pro-democratic voters to get out the vote. Montealegre noted that he is keeping the election focused on Ortega and Murillo, rather than candidate Arguello. "I don't even mention his name." He believes this has helped produce

the positive movement in the polls by keeping people focused on the election as a referendum on Ortega, painting the mayoral candidate as a pawn of Ortega and Murillo, and steering clear of Arguello's genuine personal name recognition and popularity.

¶4. (C) Montealegre does not believe that the FSLN in the National Assembly would pursue further the effort to strip him of his immunity as a National Assembly Deputy over investigations of his role as Finance Minister in the issuance of bonds to refloat Nicaragua's troubled banking sector, the so-called "CENIS cases." He considered the whole CENIS issue an effort simply to intimidate him into quitting the mayoral race or into cutting a power-sharing deal directly with the FSLN, in place of the PLC. He suggested it would take more than three months to strip him of immunity, making it a useless tool to prevent his election. Furthermore, several prominent FSLN members are among the more than 30 people charged in the CENIS cases, opening up potential internal political problems for the FSLN should they pursue the cases ahead of the elections. Montealegre was less certain about what the FSLN would do should he win the election. He admitted that they could take many steps to make governing the city difficult, such as delaying transfers of funds or disrupting intra-city transportation, among many other actions.

PRIVATE SECTOR STAYING OUT OF THE GAME

¶5. (C) Montealegre lamented that the private sector has not
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been forthcoming with needed financial help for the campaign. "The private sector is intimidated by Ortega," who is using all means at his disposal, such as customs and tax inspections, to maintain the pressure. "They are hoping to stay out of the fight to protect themselves" but don't recognize that it will only be worse for the private sector should the democratic forces lose. Montealegre expressed dismay that younger professionals are already starting to leave Nicaragua for opportunities elsewhere. While the numbers were small now, Montealegre noted it was a bad signal for Nicaragua's future.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND POSITIONING FOR 2011

¶6. (C) Motealegre commented that "the election is a mandate -- dictatorship versus democracy." If the opposition can't win, especially in Managua, Montealegre doubts there will even be presidential elections in 2011. A strong win by the FSLN will empower Ortega to press ahead with plans for constitutional change and secure an "accommodation" with ex-President and convicted felon Arnoldo Aleman. Ortega and Aleman "know they can't be re-elected" legitimately by the Nicaraguan public. The only way they can stay in power is by giving that power to select a national executive to a small group -- the National Assembly. Within this group, Ortega and Aleman wield enormous power and could engineer their continued hold on office. Aleman and Ortega maintain the closest of relationships, sharing businesses, property, investments and a tradition of having only two political forces in Nicaragua, thus ensuring they will have a common interest in pursuing constitutional changes.

¶7. (C) Ortega, in particular, is eager to secure an agreement that permits re-election of the president or that would secure his position as prime minister under a quasi-parliamentary system. Above all, Ortega needs re-election in order to retain control over the FSLN. He has no heir apparent, other than Rosario Murillo, who is hated by both the base of the party and many others in the party hierarchy. For that same reason (i.e., to eliminate potential rivals), Murillo has orchestrated the public attacks of the last several months on potential internal

rivals, such as current Managua Mayor Dionisio "Nicho" Marenco, as well as on ex-heroes of the revolution, such as Ernesto Cardenal, Doria Maria Tellez, and Carlos Mejia Godoy.

¶8. (C) Turning to the "opposition," Montealegre said that despite strong support from the base and the intermediate levels of the PLC for Liberal unity, many in the PLC leadership are not sincere. The majority of the National Assembly Deputies are not independent and are beholden to Aleman for personal, financial, or even criminal reasons. However, Montealegre reported that the Liberal base (and even independents) care much less about the risks of aligning with Aleman and are urging a stronger Liberal unity movement to confront Ortega. Montealegre believes that after the elections it will be time to finalize a deal with the PLC to form a new Liberal Party. He would even be willing to concede leadership of the party to PLC President and National Assembly Deputy Francisco Aguirre Sacassa in order to secure an agreement. The growing authoritarian tendencies of Ortega, he said, and the removal of smaller parties, such as the Conservative Party (PC) and the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), leaves his movement with no other option but to form a longer-term alliance with the PLC.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Montealegre expressed more confidence in his chances of election than he has in previous meetings, probably buoyed by the improving poll numbers and a growing level of enthusiasm from the door-to-door campaign. However, the start of the ovq{QJJ broader effort to shape the elections into a national referendum on Ortega. The lack of funding for the campaign continues to hamper Montealegre's efforts as well, driven by

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the increasingly skittish private sector's desire to avoid any appearance of conflict with Ortega. Finally, given the ongoing manipulation of the mechanics of the electoral process by the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) and the FSLN's increasingly prominent public relations campaign across the city, Montealegre will have to continue to generate enthusiasm and turn out the votes if he hopes to win in Managua.

CALLAHAN